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ABSTRACT

This guidebook is designed to help teachers think about the important role of assessment in guiding students' narrative writing, with an emphasis on the close connections among curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The assessments that are given as examples stem from a long-term collaboration between the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) and teachers in one elementary school. Learning about literature is a key feature of "writing what you read." Teachers are encouraged to assess children's narrative writing in the same way that they critically respond to literature. Two tools have been developed to support teachers in narrative assessment. One is a narrative feedback form, and the other is a narrative rubric to help teachers evaluate students' present understandings and future possibilities. Both tools are included, with explanations of their use. Explicit examples are given of the use of these forms and the assessment of actual pieces of student writing. Recommendations are also made for the future development of the project. (Contains 22 references.) (SLD)

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National Center for Research on
Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing

Final Deliverable – September 1993

Project 3.1: Studies in Improving
Classroom and Local Assessments

Portfolio Assessments for Narratives
at the Elementary Level

Writing What You Read: A Guidebook for the Assessment of Children's Narratives

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Writing What You Read

A Guidebook for the Assessment of Children's Narratives[1]

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Ms. Stevens moves around the room as her students write their stories, stopping often to conference with individual children, answering questions, and asking several of her own. She stops at Anna's desk and asks Anna to read her story aloud. As she listens, Ms. Stevens' thoughts turn to assessment. What has Anna accomplished in her creation? Does her story fall within a certain genre, and if so, does it follow genre expectations? What helpful comments can she offer Anna to commend her work as well as recommend needed revisions?

Later in the week, Ms. Stevens settles into her armchair at home, papers on her lap. She reads through several of the fairy tales her students have been composing over the past few days. As she reads, she reflects on what the writing shows about her students' understandings of this genre. What patterns from professional writing have they utilized in their own original writing? What have they learned from her instruction? And most important, how can Ms. Stevens assess their present understandings and guide their future growth as young writers?

As a teacher considers each of her students' growth as a writer, she asks herself, "Where has this child been?", "Where is he now?" and "Where can I advise him to go next?" This guidebook is designed to help teachers think about the important role of assessment in guiding students' narrative writing,

[1] Our work has received partial support from the Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow[sm] Project, Advanced Development Group, Apple Computer, Inc.; the California Assessment Collaborative; and the Educational Research and Development Center Program, cooperative agreement number R117G10027 and CFDA catalog number 84.117G, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The findings and opinions expressed in this report do not reflect the position or policies of Apple Computer, the California Assessment Collaborative, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, or the U.S. Department of Education. Our thanks to the ACOT teachers and students for their collaboration, to Edys Quellmalz for her technical assistance with rubric design, and to Joan Herman for assessment expertise. Joan Herman, Betsy Burris, Lisle Staley, and Bette Burkey responded in helpful ways to earlier drafts of this guidebook.

with particular emphasis on the close connections between curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Like Lauren and Dan Resnick (1992), we believe that it is important to "build assessments toward which you want educators to teach" (p. 59). We want educators to *teach* narrative, not as an ever-shifting set of lovely stories to be lauded, but as a foundation for analysis, reflection, and criticism which can, in turn, be used as a resource for children's original writing.

While we understand that constraints of time often limit a teacher to making fairly rapid judgments and brief comments on children's writing, teachers need not be constrained by traditional assessment practices. Brevity does not restrict a teacher to remarks on convention rather than communication, on organization rather than originality, and on generalizations rather than genre-appropriate comments. While it may seem efficient to write "Good job!" or even accurate to write "Remember your capitals!", such feedback does not provide the kinds of substantive assistance students need to guide their growth in writing. The comments that teachers make need to be linked to specific instructional issues, explicit examples from published stories, and/or the particular context of an individual child's writing accomplishments.

The assessments we describe here stem from a long-term collaboration between the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) and the teachers of one elementary school. The project focuses on classroom practice and the development of assessments that are informative to teachers and students. As reported here, our current focus is the assessment of narrative.

Writing What You Read: Integrating Narrative Curriculum and Assessment

Young authors are often encouraged to write about life experiences and the life of their individual imaginations and then to analyze the effectiveness of their written expressions. *"Write what you know"* is the advice often given to novice writers, encouraging them to take what they *know about life* and put it on paper. Yet, professional writers, including numerous children's authors, seem to suggest alternative advice: *"Write what you read,"* implying that writers are often inspired by what they *know about literature.*

Learning about literature is a key feature of *Writing What You Read*. In our work with teachers, we ask them to analyze literature in terms of the following narrative components: genre, theme, character, setting, plot, point of view, style, and tone.[2] Teachers' understandings of the components of narrative then become a springboard for integrating curricular possibilities, instructional techniques, and assessment tools. Our goal is to help teachers assess children's narrative writing in the same way that they critically respond to literature. Equipped with the "tools of the literary trade"—an understanding of genre influences, the technical vocabulary, and the orchestration of the narrative components within a text—teachers can reflect on and offer their students explicit guidance for their writing.

We have developed two tools to support teachers in narrative assessment—a *narrative feedback form* to support teacher-student conferences and a *narrative rubric* to help teachers evaluate students' present understandings and future possibilities. In the following sections of this guidebook, we describe these tools and provide examples of their uses for assessing children's stories.

Feedback Form

Teachers' strategies for assessing students' writing often result in either generic and vague commentary, whether positive ("Neat story!") or negative ("More detail"), or a focus on conventions ("Use commas in a list!") rather than on content. To encourage teachers to be more specific in their analysis and advice to children, we have developed a narrative feedback form.

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[2] Sections of this guidebook are closely adapted from the companion report, *Writing What You Read: Assessment as a Learning Event* (Wolf & Gearhart, 1993), which provides an extended explanation of the rationale for the program. The work of both the report and this guidebook evolved over a period of a year in eight workshops designed to analyze both professional literature and children's original writing. During this time the teachers read sections of Atwell's (1987) *In the Middle* as well as Lukens' (1990) *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature*. In designing the workshops, the authors depended on numerous additional articles and books in the areas of children's literature and literary criticism (e.g., Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1987; Lurie, 1990; Sloan, 1991; Wolf & Heath, 1992), process writing (e.g., Dyson, 1989; Graves, 1983), and assessment (e.g., Freedman, 1991; Hiebert, 1991; Wolf, 1989). In the context of the workshops, Wolf provided the teachers with extensive curricular materials crafted to highlight the critical features of narrative and the connections among literary texts, topics, and themes.

Narrative Feedback Form

Name: _____

Title: _____

Genre: _____

Date: _____

Heart of the Story

Theme

Setting

Convention:

audience awareness
style
tone

Communication

Writing Process:

Character

Plot

Action/Emotion

Over Time

Wolf/Gearhart/Stevens Creek, 1992

The form is designed to provide space for constructive and critical comments in the narrative areas of Theme, Character, Setting, Plot, and Communication, as well as in two issues generic to all writing—Convention and Writing Process. In using the form, teachers limit themselves to only two comments—a commendation and a recommendation—which they can place, as appropriate, in any of the seven categories. The object of the form is not to fill all seven categories with lengthy advice, but instead to choose specific points of criticism to be applied to the child's next draft or piece. Researchers working with Arts Propel (Camp, 1992) chose to take a similar approach—urging teachers to comment on "one thing that is done well in the writing, and one thing to focus on in future writing" (p. 66). The choice of category for reflection can be aligned with an instructional unit that focuses on a particular narrative component, or the advice can be keyed to an individual child's writing needs. We have encouraged our teachers to discuss the points orally with the children during mini-conferences as well as staple the feedback forms to the writing. Although the conferences are brief, usually lasting only one to two minutes, the form remains for the child's reflection. The forms also serve as reference points for both child and teacher to see how the student's writing changes over time, in terms of the evolution of a single narrative as well as the student's general development in writing.

Narrative Rubric

In designing a rubric, our goal was to create a classroom tool based on the *Writing What You Read* assessment framework (Wolf & Gearhart, 1993) that would represent children's growing competencies in narrative writing. The rubric features five evaluative scales that match the narrative components found on the feedback form: Theme, Character, Setting, Plot, and Communication. Each category is headed by horizontal *dual dimensions,* designed to emphasize the dependence of writing on its purpose and the genre selected to achieve that purpose. Children's writing development is captured in the vertical *evaluative scales* for each component. A major challenge to rubric design has been capturing the orchestration of narrative elements designed to serve a narrative's purpose.

Narrative Rubric

Theme

explicit ◄——► implicit
didactic ◄——► revealing

- Not present or not developed through other narrative elements

- Meaning centered in a series of list-like statements ("I like my mom. And I like my dad. And I like my....") or in the coherence of the action itself ("He blew up the plane. Pow!")

- Beginning statement of theme—often explicit and didactic ("The mean witch chased the children and she shouldn't have done that."); occasionally the theme, though well stated, does not fit the story

- Beginning revelation of theme on both explicit and implicit levels through the more subtle things characters say and do ("He put his arm around the dog and held him close. 'You're my best pal,' he whispered.")

- Beginning use of secondary themes, often tied to overarching theme, but sometimes tangential; main theme increasingly revealed through discovery rather than delivery, though explicit thematic statements still predominate

- Overarching theme multi-layered and complex; secondary themes integrally related to primary theme or themes; both explicit and implicit revelations of theme work in harmony ("You can't do that to my sister!", Lou cried, moving to shield Tasha with her body.)

Character

flat ◄——► round
static ◄——► dynamic

- One or two flat, static characters with little relationship between characters; either objective (action speaks for itself) or first person (author as "I") point of view

- Some rounding, usually in physical description; relationship between characters is action-driven; objective point of view is common

- Continued rounding in physical description, particularly stereotypical features ("wart on the end of her nose"); beginning rounding in feeling, often through straightforward vocabulary ("She was sad, glad, mad.")

- Beginning insights into the motivation and intention that drives the feeling and the action of main characters often through limited omniscient point of view; beginning dynamic features (of change and growth)

- Further rounding (in feeling and motivation); dynamic features appear in the central characters and in the relationships between characters; move to omniscient point of view (getting into the minds of characters)

- Round, dynamic major characters through rich description of affect, intention, and motivation; growth occurs as a result of complex interactions between characters; most characters contribute to the development of the narrative; purposeful choice of point of view

Setting

backdrop ◄——► essential
simple ◄——► multi-functional

- Backdrop setting with little or no indication of time and place ("There was a little girl. She liked candy.")

- Skeletal indication of time and place often held in past time ("once there was..."); little relationship to other narrative elements

- Beginning relationship between setting and other narrative elements (futuristic setting to accommodate aliens and spaceships); beginning symbolic functions of setting (often stereotypical images—forest as scary place)

- Setting becomes more essential to the development of the story in explicit ways: characters may remark on the setting or the time and place may be integral to the plot

- Setting may serve more than one function and the relationship between functions is more implicit and symbolic—for example, setting may be linked symbolically to character mood ("She hid in the grass, clutching the sharp, dry spikes, waiting.")

- Setting fully integrated with the characters, action, and theme of the story; role of setting is multifunctional—setting mood, revealing character and conflict, serving as metaphor

Plot

simple ◄——► complex
static ◄——► conflict

- One or two events with little or no conflict ("Once there was a cat. The cat liked milk.")

- Beginning sequence of events, but occasional out-of-sync occurrences; events without problem, problem without resolution, or little emotional response

- Single, linear episode with clear beginning, middle, and end; the episode contains four critical elements of problem, emotional response, action, and outcome

- Plot increases in complexity with more than one episode; each episode contains problem, emotional response, action, outcome; beginning relationship between episodes

- Stronger relationship between episodes (with the resolution in one leading to a problem in the next); beginning manipulation of the sequence through foreshadowing, and subplots

- Overarching problem and resolution supported by multiple, episodes; rich variety of techniques (building suspense, foreshadowing, flashbacks, denouement) to manipulate sequence

Communication

context-bound ◄——► reader-considerate
literal ◄——► symbolic

- Writing bound to context (You have to be there) and often dependent on drawing and talk to clarify the meaning; minimal style and tone

- Beginning awareness of reader considerations; straightforward style and tone focused on getting the information out; first attempts at dialogue begin

- Writer begins to make use of explanations and transitions ("because" and "so"); literal style centers on description ("sunny day"); tone explicit

- Increased information and explanation for the reader (linking ideas as well as episodes); words more carefully selected to suit the narrative's purpose (particularly through increased use of detail in imagery)

- Some experimentation with symbolism (particularly figurative language) which shows reader considerations on both explicit and implicit levels; style shows increasing variety (alliteration, word play, rhythm, etc.) and tone is more implicit

- Careful crafting of choices in story structure as well as vocabulary demonstrate considerate orchestration of all the available resources; judicious experimentation with variety of stylistic forms which are often symbolic in nature and illuminate the other narrative elements

Wolf/Gearhart/Quellmalz/Whittaker, 1993

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The dual dimensions. Because narrative includes subgenres with varied purposes and attributes, the overarching dual dimensions target some of these critical, distinguishing features.

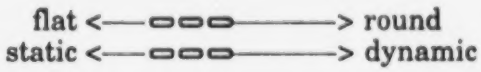
• Theme:	explicit ↔ implicit	didactic ↔ revealing
• Character:	flat ↔ round	static ↔ dynamic
• Setting:	backdrop ↔ essential	simple ↔ multi-functional
• Plot:	simple ↔ complex	static ↔ conflict
• Communication:	context-bound ↔ reader-considerate	literal ↔ symbolic

The dual dimensions are not linear sequences, with the left side of each dimension being less effective than the right. Instead they are continua whose definitions and appropriateness depend on subgenre. The dimensions provide a means for teachers to represent the ideal range of characteristics of the selected subgenre. A student's writing can then be assessed according to how well the child was able to develop and communicate a story within that subgenre.

Thus, depending on the subgenre and purpose, Themes move between explicit and sometime didactic statements to implicit revelations. Characters can be flat personalities who remain static and unchanging in a story, or they can come equipped with more rounded physical and emotional description and change over time. The Setting can be a simple cardboard backdrop, or it can take on a more essential, multi-functional role. The Plot can also be simple and without tension, or it can evolve in conflict and complexity. Narrative Communication can move between literal and symbolic meanings in style and tone. In addition, Narrative Communication (as well as poetry, exposition, and other genres) can be bound to context or more aware of audience considerations. Thus our rubric is sufficiently malleable to adjust to individual subgenres of narrative (e.g., folk tale, science fiction), for certain scale points are more applicable to particular subgenres than others.

In using the rubric, teachers shade or mark off a band on the dimensions to indicate the range of desired features for an assigned subgenre and thus represent their expectations for children's writing within that genre. For example, for a fable the indicated band would favor the left side of each

dimension, appropriate to the characteristics of the fable subgenre. The marks for Character in a fable might look like this:



The story of *The Lion and the Mouse* provides a good example. While we may believe that the lion saved by the mouse will change his attitude towards rodents, we have no textual confirmation in the fable that this will be the case. The character of the lion is quite appropriately reserved to physical description—he is "big," "strong," with "great paws," while the mouse has the opposite attributes. In some published versions of the tale, however, we may have beginning insights into the mouse's motivation (for she is clever and motivated by survival instincts) as well as into the lion's (for he may smile or chuckle as he listens to the mouse's offer). But detailed description would take the narrative beyond the conventions of a fable.

As the teacher provides instruction in fables, she or he would discuss the typicality of flat and static characters within the subgenre, but also indicate the range of possibilities within that general tendency. Depending on their developing competencies in the subgenre, children could position their writing within that range; a less experienced writer may lean toward very flat, static characters, focusing on the action between the characters, while a more experienced author might—within the conventions of fables—move toward more round and dynamic features, addressing the motivations and intentions behind the actions.

Thus the dual dimensions are not only assessment tools but touchstones for selecting materials and designing lessons. We believe that when a teacher selects a tradebook, she needs to think carefully about the instructional lenses she will use to teach it. For example, what is the author trying to accomplish? What narrative components are noteworthy? Decisions for what to teach from a piece of literature are highly independent choices—what is instructionally appealing for one teacher will be quite different for another. And what children choose to think, say, and write from their explorations into literature will also vary tremendously. Yet, we do not advocate a "blooming, buzzing confusion." Instead, we hope that teachers will make their curricular and

instructional decisions based on extensive experience in text analysis and clear reflection of what might work instructionally within a piece of text. The dual dimensions thus serve as reminders of the critical and variant features of each of the narrative components.

The evaluative scales. For each component the rubric includes a six-level evaluative scale designed to match generalized understandings of children's writing development (Dyson & Freedman, 1991) with what the teachers in our study knew about their own students' writing. Choosing the number of levels and the descriptors for those levels was difficult, but like Hiebert (1991) we believed that "for classroom purposes, schemes that focus on specific dimensions are more helpful" (p. 514). We opted for six because writing development is complex enough to merit a differentiated portrait. We eliminated numerical scores at each level to discourage unproductive focus on the meaning of a "4" or a "2" or a "5." We wanted to avoid placing more emphasis on a child's rank than on his or her performance within a particular context.

The scales work in tandem with the dimensions. For students' written fables, analytic scale points in Character could shift between the second and fourth points, depending on the direct or more subtle hints the writer offers about character. Younger writers may focus more on the action between the characters, while older writers may provide initial insights into the intentions behind the action. While our analytic rubric contains scales for differentiated narrative elements, the *use* of the rubric is designed to highlight the critical nature of *orchestration* in the writing process. Successful writing is not dependent on pre-cast criteria, or the simplicity or complexity of individual components; the components must work together within the genre frame and the writer's individual choices. If we say that all stories should involve complex character development, then the boy who cried wolf would once again defy the status quo. If we suggest that all themes should only be stated implicitly, then we must discount Charlotte's final words about friendship (White, 1952). It is in the orchestration of narrative components and in the interplay of authorial choices that a text succeeds, not in isolated rules and regulations.

Still, an analytic response to narrative elements can be helpful for indicating both strengths and areas needing refinement. If a child writes a

piece of realistic fiction with little or no conflict, underdeveloped characters, and no theme, there is certainly room for explicit guidance to lead the child toward more effective writing, and a helpful "next step" might indeed be a focus on enhancing the narrative's treatment of just one of the elements. Even mature, successful writers could look to the rubric to assess their stories and see possibilities for further development.

Assessment Examples

We next illustrate uses of the rubric and the feedback form for the assessment of children's narrative writing. First, we take the vertical dimensions of the rubric for Theme, Character, Setting, Plot, and Communication, and, for each dimension, we offer examples of students' writing that fit each of the six levels. While the samples are brief and many are excerpts, these collections provide a helpful array of possibilities for the *Writing What You Read* approach to the developmental analysis of narrative.

Second, we present and critique our collaborating teachers' analyses of two complete student stories—one at the primary and one at the upper elementary level. The teachers' analyses include their rubric ratings as well as their comments on the feedback form. We offer a metacommentary on the teachers' assessments, discussing where their analyses seem most appropriate and where the ratings or comments reflect possible misunderstandings of narrative.

Developmental Analysis of Children's Narratives: An Overview

In the following charts we take each of the narrative components and provide an example from children's writing that exemplifies each of the levels. To be sure, few of the examples perfectly "fit" a given level, but there are specific features of the samples that match a particular level more than others. It is important to justify the rating of a child's writing not only in terms of where it best fits, but also in terms of what it doesn't do. This "double description" gives the teacher a chance to rate the present writing as well as think about where she might encourage the child to go next.

In this case, the rating of the examples is not governed by genre or by grade level. You will notice that a younger child can execute a more complex story than an older child, though primary age children's samples do

predominate in the early levels and intermediate and upper elementary samples in the later levels. It is important to notice that there are no examples offered at the sixth level of any of the components. We have struggled with this issue—wondering if we are overly idealizing a "6" rating and thus eliminating the possibility that an elementary child can get one. Yet, we were not able to find any "6" stories in the extensive sample we collected. While we still believe it is possible for an elementary school child to score a "6", we also think it will be rare.

The charts are designed with the unnumbered rubric levels on the left and the children's writing samples on the right. The children's writing has been corrected for conventional spelling, for we did not want to shift attention away from the *content* of the samples. Punctuation and grammar remain true to the original writing.

Theme

Rubric level	Example
Not present or not developed through other narrative elements	*A Frog and Toad Adventure* Frog and Toad and snake there in a forest. They get bit by a snake friendship (1st grader)
Meaning centered in a series of list-like statements ("I like my mom. And I like my dad. And I like my....") or in the coherence of the action itself ("He blew up the plane. Pow!")	*Friends* Adam and Larry don't like each other. One day Adam got hurt by tripping on a rock and Larry helped Adam and then they were friends. They like to go to school together. They like to play together. They like to read books together. They were best friends. (2nd grader)
Beginning statement of theme—often explicit and didactic ("The mean witch chased the children and she shouldn't have done that."); occasionally the theme, though well-stated, does not fit the story	*The Easter Play* It was a stormy Saturday and I (Karen) was trying to get my little sister (Holly) to wear a gypsy costume. Then my big brother (Larry) came in and started making fun of the costume because I had made it myself. "How would you like it if you made a costume and somebody made fun of yours?" "Huh?" Well that fixed him. (2nd grader)
Beginning revelation of theme on both explicit and implicit levels through the more subtle things characters say and do ("He put his arm around the dog and held him close. 'You're my best pal,' he whispered.")	*Wilbur Spends a day with Fern* ...Fern flipped over the old milk pail and started talking to Wilbur. "Wilbur, I have missed you a lot so I decided to spend a day with you." She put him on a leash and took him to the park. Wilbur couldn't believe that this was really happening. He was so happy he didn't watch where he was going, and he fell into the little duck pond. When he lifted his head he had a lily pad on his head. Fern took Wilbur out of the pond and dried him off in the grass. They decided to have lunch. They sat under a tree and watched the leaves fall off the tree and blow in the wind. Soon the day was over and Fern had to take Wilbur back to his pen. It was hard to see Fern go but now Wilbur knew she loved him. (4th grader)

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Beginning use of secondary themes, often tied to overarching theme, but sometimes tangential; main theme increasingly revealed through discovery rather than delivery, though explicit thematic statements still predominate	*My Sister, Kristi* *We stayed there all night and then in the morning I went into check on her, and then I looked if there was a heart beat. There was nothing. I screamed for the doctor. Then Mom and Dad rushed into the room, the doctor told me that she was dead, and it looked like she had been dead for a while. I couldn't believe it, and I wouldn't believe it! I thought it was all my fault, letting Mike spike the punch. His parents were the only ones that had an alcohol problem. I was ready to faint. I still couldn't understand why it had to happen to my sister. I missed her already, even though she just left me.* *...I learned a BIG lesson from the mistake that Kristi made. It's a mistake that I will never make in my life and I hope no one ever will. I know that I can tell my friends that getting drunk and driving, and disobeying your parents when they trusted you, can ruin or risk your life forever. Even if it's not your fault. I think that you should really take your responsibilities seriously. You should never do drugs, smoke, or drink alcohol. That is something that can get you in a lot of trouble, or can really risk your life forever. That's something that I won't do, because I really do want to live for as long as I can....And if you want to commit suicide, talk about it.* **(6th grader)**
Overarching theme multi-layered and complex; secondary themes integrally related to primary theme or themes; both explicit and implicit revelations of theme work in harmony ("You can't do that to my sister!", Lou cried, moving to shield Tasha with her body.)	**No example available.**

Character

Rubric level	Example
One or two flat, static characters with little relationship between characters; either objective (action speaks for itself) or first person (author as "I") point of view	*The Bat* A bat was flying behind a car outside in the rain. Then a mouse was eating a mess of cheese. Then a rat came by, but the bat lost. **(1st grader)**
Some rounding, usually in physical description; relationship between characters is action-driven; objective point of view is common	*A Frog and Toad Adventure* Once upon a time Frog and Toad went to the zoo. Toad went to see the snakes, and got bit by a snake. Toad cried and frog came over and frog got bit by a snake too. They both went to the hospital. Then they got better and they never went to the zoo again. **(1st grader)**
Continued rounding in physical description, particularly stereotypical features ("wart on the end of her nose"); beginning rounding in feeling, often through straightforward vocabulary ("She was sad, glad, mad.")	*Surf Witch* There once was a witch named Surf witch. She was evil and wicked. She wore a black hat and black boots. Wherever she went she took her surfboard and her magic wand and her hat and spent her days surfing... **(2nd grader)**
Beginning insights into the motivation and intention that drives the feeling and the action of main characters often through limited omniscient point of view; beginning dynamic features (of change and growth)	*The Seven Chinese Brothers* **(from the youngest's point of view)** ...My house is shared with all my older and remarkable brothers. All of us look very similar. 1st brother, could see far, far away. He can see so far, that he can look at a ladybug walking across the Great Wall of China. 2nd brother, could hear the ladybug quietly walking across the Great Wall. 3rd brother, is able to walk across China in a straight line, by moving any obstacles in his way, and carefully placing them back. 4th brother, has bones of iron, that won't bend or buckle. 5th brother, can never get hot. He is able to work in the blazing sun all day, and not even sweat. 6th brother, has legs that could grow so tall, that an airplane flies under him. I consider all my brothers incredible. Now, I don't consider my talent to be a special power, but I'll tell you anyway. When I'm sad, and then I cry, my tears, are able to flood my whole village! That is why I try really hard not to cry. My brothers always try to keep me happy. **(6th grader)**

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Further rounding (in feeling and motivation); dynamic features appear in the central characters and in the relationships between characters; move to omniscient point of view (getting into the minds of characters)	*The Secret Key* *... Fifteen minutes later, Esther wanted to go in the garden to see how Tammie was doing with the flowers. Then Esther saw that the door was open to the secret garden. She motioned Ms. Monaghon to push her into the garden. There she found Tammie. She was raging mad. "Get out of my garden! Get out! I don't want you here anymore! You're not welcome in my home!" screamed Esther. Tammie was trying so hard not to force back tears. She ran up to her bedroom, her red hair practically flying ahead of her. As Tammie was packing up, Esther rolled herself into the guest room. "I know I was a little rough with you. It's just I made sure that I would never go into that garden after my husband died," explained Esther. As if she could read Tammie's mind, she said, "Roger had cancer, it was fatal....* **(6th grader)**
Round, dynamic major characters through rich description of affect, intention, and motivation; growth occurs as a result of complex interactions between characters; most characters contribute to the development of the narrative; purposeful choice of point of view	**No example available.**

Setting

Rubric level	Example
Backdrop setting with little or no indication of time and place ("There was a little girl. She liked candy.")	The Mitten Once upon a time a mitten dropped down on the ground and a bear came by and climbed into the mitten and a cricket came by and climbed in the mitten and a fox came by and a boy came by and found his mitten and all the animals ran away. **(1st grader)**
Skeletal indication of time and place often held in past time ("once there was..."); little relationship to other narrative elements	Jake and Pete Once there was a boy named Jake. He was lonely. He didn't have any friends. One day he went to the mall and met a friend. His name was Jake. Everyday after school they went to the mall. After a few weeks they became best friends because. **(2nd grader)**
Beginning relationship between setting and other narrative elements (futuristic setting to accommodate aliens and spaceships); beginning symbolic functions of setting (often stereotypical images—forest as scary place)	Friends Once upon a time, there was a tiny wolf that lived in a huge forest in Scotland. This was not an ordinary wolf, because this wolf was an orphan. The wolf's name was Willy. Willy didn't know how to catch food, eat food, and the most important thing he didn't know how to defend himself. Until one day when he was exploring in the forest he was heard by another wolf. The other wolf's name was Grandpa Wolf. Grandpa Wolf popped out at Willy and started growling and he said, "What are you doing in this huge forest?!"... **(3rd grader)**
Setting becomes more essential to the development of the story in explicit ways: characters may remark on the setting or the time and place may be integral to the plot	Treasures ...On the beaches there are many special palm trees, they have jewels instead of tree parts. Their trunks are made of diamond, their long leaves are money (of Lomasquee), instead of coconuts they are replaced by gold nuggets....that's only one treasure of Lomasquee. Lomasquee has many other treasure just wait... Once the rain drops hit the ground, or something hard, they become tiny diamonds. That's the time when everyone comes out and picks as many precious jewels as they can. **(5th grader)**

Setting may serve more than one function and the relationship between functions is more implicit and symbolic—for example, setting may be linked symbolically to character mood ("She hid in the grass, clutching the sharp, dry spikes, waiting.")	*The Secret Key* *...Tammie's favorite place was Esther's garden. Ms. Monaghon was too busy to ever work on the garden, so Tammie had to do it herself, but she never minded, she loved that garden. Anyway, one day as Tammie was cleaning some ivy off of the wall, she noticed a keyhole. She quickly brushed away the grub and looked at the door. A picture of Jesus and Mary was engraved on it. Tammie imagined that it was about 200 years old. She wondered what would be behind that door.* *Tammie played with the idea of asking Esther where the key was. She decided not to. She had to find it herself...* **(6th grader)**
Setting fully integrated with the characters, action, and theme of the story; role of setting is multifunctional—setting mood, revealing character and conflict, serving as metaphor	No example available.

Plot

Rubric level	Example
One or two events with little or no conflict ("Once there was a cat. The cat liked milk.")	T Rex A long time ago there was a dinosaur and it was big and it was named Tyrannosaurus Rex and Tyrannosaurus Rex stepped on the trees. **(1st grader)**
Beginning sequence of events, but occasional out-of-sync occurrences; events without problem, problem without resolution, or little emotional response	Another Misty Halloween It had been a whole year since last Halloween. Misty the ghost was putting up decorations and humming, "A haunting we will go," over and over again. Scary the Rat was putting up ceiling decorations and whistling the same tune. It was ten days 'till Halloween and every ghost in town knew the time had come to put up decorations. "Oh no!" said Misty, as the last decoration was put up. "What now," said Scary. "We forgot the spooky spiders." Scary dropped to the floor. When he woke up Misty was gone. A few minutes later, he returned. A few days later, Scary got sick. Misty treated him for five days. When he got better, it was one day 'til Halloween. On Halloween, Misty went as a ghost (of course.) Scary gave out treats. Misty was gone for two hours. When he came home, he pigged out and played Super Nintendo. **(5th grader)**
Single, linear episode with clear beginning, middle, and end; the episode contains four critical elements of problem, emotional response, action, and outcome	The Race Track A couple of years ago, there were two girls named Kelly and Rachel. They were at an amusement park and saw a bumper car ride. "Come on, it will be fun" said Kelly. So they took the same car. The sign said car racing, but the cars looked exactly like bumper cars. "And they're off!" yelled a man. "What?!" exclaimed Rachel who was driving. "They're off!? Whose off?" "Exciting!" shouted Kelly. "Easy for you to say. You're not the one who's steering this thing," shouted Rachel nervously. "Calm down," said Kelly. "I'll switch places with you then. "Switch places? How? We are moving 80 miles per hour," said Rachel. "OK, hang on to the wheel. I will slide over and get into the drivers seat." So they did it. In a very few seconds, the two girls had switch places, but were still on the track! "All right, now I guess the only thing to do is follow the track to the end," said Kelly. They passed two cars and didn't see anybody in front of them! ..."Do you think we might be in front?" asked Kelly. "No way, we have never been in a race. We don't have a chance against these pros," said Rachel. Ahead in the distance they saw the finish line. "Wait a minute; we might be," said Rachel. Suddenly their car hit the finish line and the crowd roared. "Wow! We won," yelled Rachel. Then a man ran up to them and gave them each some flowers. "You girls aren't listed in the book," said the man. "We thought this was a bumper car ride," said Rachel. Everything was straightened out and Kelly and Rachel both went home and told their parents about their adventure. **(4th grader)**

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Plot increases in complexity with more than one episode; each episode contains problem, emotional response, action, outcome; beginning relationship between episodes	*Alicia Learns to Dance* *... All day, Alicia was in deep thought. Not about making new friends, but this time about taking the ballet class.* *When Alicia got home, she ran straight up to her room to think things through.* *After a while, Alicia trotted downstairs with a question for her mother. Trying to look as cute as she could, Alicia walked to her mother. Her mother turned around and looked at Alicia. She was astonished to see the face that Alicia had put on. "Mother," she said, "Today I met a delightful girl named Melissa. She asked me to take a ballet class with her every Wednesday. Please may I go?"* *"I'm not quite sure, do you really want to go?" her mother asked.* *"Yes, I am positive, I have been thinking about it all day!" said Alicia.* *"Well, if you are sure, I guess you can go," replied her mother.* *"Oh thank you, Mother!" Alicia said excitedly. She kissed her mother and ran upstairs.* *The next morning Alicia was the first one to get to school...* **(4th grader)**
Stronger relationship between episodes (with the resolution in one leading to a problem in the next); beginning manipulation of the sequence through foreshadowing, and subplots	*My Sister, Kristi* *From Chapter 1: The Birthday Party: ..When I got inside the house, I saw Kristi, my older sister, working on her homework ..Kristi had already made me a cup of hot cocoa with marshmallows. Kristi and I always got along well, so our mother nor father had to worry about us arguing.* *...Since Kristi's 16th birthday was coming up, she decided to have a party at our house. She hadn't asked Mom or Dad yet. Usually it was okay with them. So at dinner Kristi asked Mom and Dad if she could have a party. Of course they agreed. They weren't worried about the alcohol...* *From Chapter 2: Setting Up: ..I had the job to make sure that no alcohol got into the punch. I thought that I wouldn't have to because I trusted everyone.* *While Gina and I were upstairs, I guess Mike (Kristi's boyfriend) had spiked the punch and everyone got drunk. Aya was probably the drunkest out of everyone. Kristi was really drunk too!! Well, Aya asked Kristi to go and get some beer, but Kristi couldn't drive yet. So she just borrowed Aya's new car. But Aya must not of cared enough to stop her from leaving. I didn't know that she left without telling anyone except Aya. And I knew that Aya was too drunk to even care.* *From Chapter 3: The Hospital: It had been about five hours, and Kristi wasn't back yet. I don't think anyone noticed though. I was really worried, until the doorbell rang and I thought it was Kristi, but it wasn't. It was a policeman. Everyone was watching him as he stepped into the house. They looked worried, like they were in BIG trouble or something. He told me that Kristi was in the hospital, and that she might not live too much longer. She was making a right turn and she rammed into a big oak tree....* **(6th grader)**
Overarching problem and resolution supported by multiple episodes; rich variety of techniques (building suspense, foreshadowing, flashbacks, denouement) to manipulate sequence	**No example available.**

Communication

Rubric level	Example
Writing bound to context (You have to be there) and often dependent on drawing and talk to clarify the meaning; minimal style and tone	*Afraid* *A mouse was afraid of a cat at home because* (1st grader)
Beginning awareness of reader considerations; straightforward style and tone focused on getting the information out; first attempts at dialogue begin	*Baseball* *...Rabbit hit a home run and Toad saw it. He wanted to play. So he caught the ball on the ground and threw it over the trees. Frog was mad. Toad, I'll get you for that. Why did you do that? "Toad, you didn't even ask if you could play," Frog said.* *"Well, can I?" said Toad.* *Yes, but first I have to teach you how to play. If you don't throw the ball over the trees, I'll let you play.* (1st grader)
Writer begins to make use of explanations and transitions ("because" and "so"); literal style centers on description ("sunny day"); tone explicit	*The Gecko and the Lizard* *...The lizard and the gecko were both thinking about how to make a map to plan their adventure. They were thinking and thinking and finally they had an idea. They both agreed on it So they decided to use their magic to write on a piece of paper and the lizard said I will do it with magic. So the lizard opened his mouth and bit into the paper with his teeth and the blank piece of paper turned into a map of where they will sleep and eat...* (2nd grader)
Increased information and explanation for the reader (linking ideas as well as episodes); words more carefully selected to suit the narrative's purpose (particularly through increased use of detail in imagery)	*The Seven Chinese Brothers (from the youngest's point of view)* *The place that I live in must be the most beautiful of all. My comfortable, little, wooden, house lies on a large, grassy, hill, over looking almost all of China And you can see, from a hundred miles away, the Great Wall of China...* (6th grader)

Some experimentation with symbolism (particularly figurative language) which shows reader considerations on both explicit and implicit levels; style shows increasing variety (alliteration, word play, rhythm, etc.) and tone is more implicit	<u>Wilbur Spends a day with Fern</u> *One rainy day in March, Wilbur was laying on the manure pile in the barn. The wind blew the leaves across the lonely barnyard like a flock of birds soaring through the sky. The rain poured down the roof of the barn and occasionally dripped through a little hole in the roof and onto Wilbur's nose. It was not a normal rainy day for Wilbur. He was particularly sad because ever since Fern was interested in Henry Fussy, she hadn't come to see him that much. When Mr. Zuckerman came to feed the animals in his rain coat, Wilbur was so sad that he didn't eat. He just sat on his manure pile and thought about Fern. Mr. Zuckerman was surprised to see that Wilbur didn't want his lunch.* *That night, Mr. Zuckerman talked to the Arables because he had a plan in mind that would make Wilbur feel better.* *The next morning it had stopped raining and a beautiful rainbow had formed over the barn. The rainbow made Wilbur feel a little bit better. The birds sang like little harps playing in an orchestra. To Wilbur's surprise, Fern came skipping to his pen...* **(4th grader)**
Careful crafting of choices in story structure as well as vocabulary demonstrate considerate orchestration of all the available resources; judicious experimentation with variety of stylistic forms which are often symbolic in nature and illuminate the other narrative elements	No example available.

We now turn to two children's stories analyzed by our collaborating teachers. Both stories came from children in the school, but they were not identified in terms of either name or grade level.

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Primary Story: *The Dragon Fight*

The first story the teachers analyzed was a primary child's fairy tale. Her class had been exploring the patterns of fairy tales—the stereotypical "once upon a time" opening and "happily ever after" ending, the typical fairy tale characters with requisite king, queen, and princess, as well as the inevitable battle between a young prince and the evil nemesis in the shape of a dragon or witch. The culminating assignment was for the children to write their own original tale.

Before reading and analyzing the story, the teachers discussed their interpretation of the genre and shaded the dual dimensions to display their expectations. All of their markings favored the left hand side of the dimensions. They felt that theme was relatively explicit. Even though it was not directly stated (as a theme in a fable), the message was quite clear and often didactic: "good conquers evil" and "wit supersedes strength." The teachers were well aware of the more subtle psychological messages in many fairy tales (Bettelheim, 1975), but they did not expect to explore these thematic possibilities in their primary instruction. They perceived the characters of fairy tales to be relatively flat, with more physical than emotional description. They also felt that while the characters might change, they were not overly dynamic. They decided that the setting would hover between backdrop and essential—they expected to find castles and forests, though they did not think the settings would take on diverse multifunctional roles. They placed the emphasis on plot in the center of the dimensions—relatively simple, yet complex enough to provide more than one episode. They also expected at least one major conflict centered on a confrontation between good and evil. While the teachers knew that fairy tales could be heavily symbolic, they felt that primary instruction focused more on literal communication.

The following chart provides the story of *The Dragon Fight*, the teachers' ratings of the story, and a summary of their scores with our own commentary. Notice that the teachers assigned number scores. Even though we generally discourage the use of number markings for the rubric, in this case of matching and comparing individual teacher opinions we used the numbers for easy reference.

The Dragon Fight

Once upon a time there was a princess (Allison) and she lived in a castle with her dad (the king) and her mom (the queen). She was very happy. The only thing she wanted was a knight in the kingdom. One morning she woke up and unlike other mornings it was pitch black! She jumped out of bed threw on her bathrobe and flew down stairs.

Allison went into the royal chamber and told her dad "Daddy, daddy the sky is pitch black if you haven't noticed!" "I haven't noticed but I have been waiting for this day" he said "This week every year a dragon and a cave appear. It is the same dragon as the year before but it has as many heads as it got wacked the year before." "The dragon is big and powerful and it is ugly and scaly and is a bad horrible mist green color." Allison's father seemed very serious. "How many heads will it have this year?" "My dear this year it will have 100 heads." Allison went away thinking that her dad was trying to trick her.

The next day she sent for a knight. She sent for the strongest, bravest knight in the kingdom. The knight came knocking at the door. Allison answered the door. "Hello my name is Adam" Allison introduced herself as Allison the princess. Allison explained about the dragon and when she was done he left and said, "Tomorrow I will go to the cave and try to fight your dragon" "Thank you," said Allison and he left.

The next day Adam came back and told the king he was going to fight the dragon. The king gave Adam a good luck charm "Wear this for hope and luck" "Thank you" said Adam and he left. Adam went to the cave. It was very hot in the cave, and as he got further into the cave he saw more and more bones. The cave was getting very hot by that time and Adam could see more and more green at the end of the cave. Finally Adam got to the end of the cave. He saw a little green dragon with a little blue point at the end of her tail. She was so cute. Adam took her back to the castle and showed the king. We will name her after the princess of the castle, Allison" After all doesn't a fairy tale always end up," and they lived happily ever after?"

	Teachers' Ratings
Theme	3, 3, 3, 4, 3, 2, 4, 3, 1
Character	3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 5, 3, 2
Setting	3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 2, 3
Plot	3, 3, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3
Communication	3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 3, *, 4, 3

On the average, the teachers rated the **theme** of this story as a "3," suggesting that the explicit final sentence summarized the story's message. As the author points out, many fairy tales have similar endings, but what is missing is the more subtle theme of maturation through adventure and challenge, which is the mark of many fairy tale quests. In this story, no one changes or grows through the experience, and thus the story cannot merit a higher rating.

The typical **character** rating fell between a "2" and a "3." We are inclined to give a "3" rating for Allison's energy and bossiness comes through her actions as well as her language. Still, there is not enough information to allow for a "4" rating—for example, we know she wants a knight, but we have no idea why.

Setting was appropriately rated as a "3"—castles, dragons, and royalty all meet together in a stereotypical fairy tale setting. The author's description of the cave also helped to build the suspense in the adventure, but it still serves more of a backdrop than an essential role.

The teachers rated the **plot** as a "3." We are inclined to give the story a "3.5" or low "4" rating for it has more than one episode, and each episode has all the critical elements, although the emotional response is minimal. The episodes are also quite brief and the ending is rather confusing, which is why we suggest a "low 4." While we may have some hints at foreshadowing (such as when Allison thinks her father is tricking her) there is not enough manipulation of the plot to move the story into a "5" rating.

Finally, the teachers scored **communication** as a high "3," and again we agree. The author's word choice pushes her toward a "4" but the lack of information about motivation or emotional response holds the rating to a "3."

Interestingly enough, when the teachers completed their ratings and we told them that the author was a second grader, most said they would be inclined to raise their scores. However, we feel that the scores they assigned were quite appropriate to the story.

* One teacher left the communication rating blank.

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After scoring the story, the teachers used the feedback form to provide commendations and recommendations. In general, we have advised teachers to consider the following five guidelines when making *usable* comments to children:

- Be specific—tie your remark explicitly to the child's story.
- Be clear and considerate—write in language the child can understand.
- Limit your comments to one commendation and one recommendation—avoid a jumbled list. You can use the rubric to guide your choice for a commendation and recommendation.
- Tie your remarks to what you have tried to accomplish in your instruction—if you are working on a particular genre, what features do you expect to find in the child's writing? Use key examples from the professional literature you used in your instruction to provide background and models.
- Keep the developmental perspective in mind—where has this child been and where do you want to guide him/her next?

The teachers' comments on *The Dragon Fight* are located on the left of each of the following tables, with our metacommentary offered on the right.

Theme

Recommendations & Commendations	Metacommentary
No comments	None of the teachers made any comments on theme. The teachers have told us that they often feel at a loss for words in this area and only recently have they begun to emphasize theme in their narrative instruction. This is unfortunate, for the message the author is trying to communicate is often the heart of the story. A common fairy tale theme is courage in the face of danger. Being clever or good at heart usually leads to "happily ever after." An evil and threatening dragon, for instance, might be transformed into a "cute" creature, but this is usually a magical reward for kindnesses granted. In our own response to this student we might discuss these fairy tale patterns and then write: *"There is no explanation for the dragon's change from 'ugly' to 'cute.' In fairy tales, heros usually defeat enemies through strength or with magic gifts (like in* The Water of Life*). How could the prince get and use magic to change the dragon from mean to nice?"*

Character

Recommendations & Commendations	Metacommentary
• Perhaps you could develop your characters a bit more—more description, feelings, etc. • Tell me more about Allison. She is your heroine and I would like a clearer picture of what she is like.	Here the teachers want more character information. Although the first comment is a bit too general, the next comment asks for more specific details for Allison. Because Allison is the protagonist, this comment is particularly justified, for fairy tale heroines are often stereotypically described as kind-hearted as well as beautiful. The details of their costumes are usually supplied, as is their close relationship to small animals.
• I liked the description of the knight you were seeking—strongest, bravest knight in the kingdom. He also had a tender side (cute dragon). • Good description. Knight is brave and believably courageous just as knights should be.	The teachers are generally quite satisfied with the knight's description and their commendations are genre appropriate. The knight doesn't flinch in the face of such a task, but stoically agrees and takes off immediately for the cave, come what may.
• Good physical description of the knight—need to know how the knight feels about the problem.	Still, this teacher encourages some emotional response for the knight and this is a good recommendation. Even storybook knights have their moments when fear sweeps over them, though, of course, they bravely push on.
• What happened to Mom? Eliminate unnecessary characters. Story could use some physical description of characters—only one you describe is the dragon.	This comment gives somewhat mixed advice—eliminate some characters and enhance others. If the teacher gave more specific direction it would help the author: *"Give more information on the major characters—the King, Allison, and the Prince—tell what they look like and how they feel about what's happening to them."*

Setting

Recommendations & Commendations	Metacommentary
• I understand the general description of your setting—kingdom, cave, castle, but more detail at the beginning would make the story a little more clear and exciting.	This teacher is justified in her comments on the "typicality" of the setting as well as in her plea for a bit more detail. Fairy tales often supply rich descriptions of castles, forests, and the cottages of dwarfs. Though setting detail is not a requirement, it could enhance the story.
• You have given a very good description of the cave—it was "hot" "bones" "little green dragon"—I almost feel like I was there. • Wonderful description of the dragon's cave. You made it easy to picture where the prince was.	These commendations offer insight into the above request. The author was successful in bringing the dragon's cave to life through her detailed description and she might try to utilize similar techniques to describe the castle.

Plot

Recommendations & Commendations	Metacommentary
• The plot develops clearly. I can see a concise beginning, middle and end. • I like the way you set up a situation that allowed the character to accomplish 2 goals. Solved the problem of the annual recurring dragon and the princess's desire to get a knight.	The teachers are right to commend the author on her clear plot development, particularly the balance of two problems and their combined resolution. However, the first comment is too general and could almost apply to any story and the second comment has a bit too much jargon ("annual recurring dragon") to be easily understood.
• Why would she think her father would trick her? • Unresolved explanation of father's idea—100 heads. Need to explain further. • What is the connection with the 100 head dragon and little green dragon? Do you have an incomplete conclusion?	Although there is a clear resolution to the story's problems, there is not enough justification to support it. The teachers here have consequently asked for more explanation—particularly of those aspects of the story that remain unanswered, such as the father's "trick" or the sudden transformation of the dragon. Our recommendation would be: *"What happened to the King's 'trick'? You set out an interesting idea ('the trick'), but then didn't use it."*
• I like the beginning of your story and I am anxious to find out if Allison gets her knight. The ending is very suspenseful until Adam captures the dragon. I would like to know what the king says at the end. Does Allison get her knight for sure?	While it is certain that Allison does get a knight to accomplish her task, we don't know if the happily ever after ending results in a typical fairy tale marriage. The absence of a wedding ceremony is somewhat jarring to the last teacher, whose expectations align with what is normally found in the genre. The teacher could suggest that the author either add the wedding or provide an explanation for why it doesn't take place. The teacher might also eliminate the comments on suspense and the king, for they seem to distract from her main criticism.

Communication

Recommendations & Commendations	Metacommentary
• I liked how you used your describing words. • You really worked at descriptive phrases and using symbolism—"hot cave...more and more bones"!	The teachers' commendations of the author's "describing words" are appropriate, particularly when they supply examples, as the second teacher does. Our commendation would also note the use of adjectives ("pitch black" and "bad horrible mist green color") as well as the kind of language that reveals Allison's rather supercilious character ("in case you haven't noticed!")
• Good organization. Simplistic intro of character use of parenthesis	This teacher's comment on organization might be better off as a commendation for plot, though it should be written with less jargon and enhanced with specific examples. In our workshop, the second half of the comment caused a lot of conversation. Although the teacher was put off by the use of parenthesis to introduce the character names, the other teachers found it to be highly skilled and quite humorous. We agree with the majority, and although the technique has the potential to be overused, we found it to be an engaging aspect of the story.

Upper Elementary Story: *The True Three Little Pigs*

The second story the teachers analyzed was an upper elementary child's fractured fairy tale. His class had been exploring the patterns of this humorous subgenre, which often breaks the rules of a familiar fairy tale or retells it from another's point of view (for example, *Snow White* told from the stepmother's viewpoint). Some of the most famous trade book examples have recently come from John Scieszka. In *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs!* (1989), he tells the famous British tale from the point of view of the wolf, who tries to proclaim his innocence. In *The Frog Prince Continued* (1991), Scieszka picks up the story where the "happily ever after" ending left off, very much like Steven Sondheim's Broadway play *Into the Woods*. And in *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992), he upends, distorts, combines, and generally laughs at a number of classic tales. After studying the patterns, the culminating assignment was for the children to write their own original, upended tale.

Before reading and analyzing the story, the teachers discussed their interpretation of the fractured fairy tale genre and shaded the dual dimensions to display their expectations. As with fairy tales, their markings favored the left hand side of the dimensions, but there were some important differences which moved their marks slightly to the right. In the area of theme, they stressed the unexpected nature of the genre—for example, "happily ever after" endings might not be so happy. Still, these themes were often explicitly stated. The characters of such tales were more rounded as they tried to justify their behavior and proclaim their innocence. However, they were still relatively unchanging. Although Snow White's stepmother might try to tell her side of the story, we will still have a sense that "the lady doth protest too much." She's not willing to change her evil intentions about Snow White; she just wants the reader on her side. The teachers felt that their markings for setting would again stress a balance between backdrop and essential. The setting could take on more multi-functional roles, however, if the author decided to use the forest as a stomping ground for multiple fairy tale characters as Scieszka did in *The Frog Prince Continued*. Their plot markings allowed for multiple episodes surrounding a central conflict. Finally, the teachers expected communication to become more symbolic. The words of the stepmother, for example, might take on dual roles—as she tries to claim innocence, her words trap her into guilt ("I mean, how could I help it? Snow White's hair just got tangled up in my hand!!"). You can almost see the author winking at the reader through the choice of words.

The chart below provides a student's story of *The True Three Little Pigs*, the teachers' ratings, and a summarization of their scores with our own commentary.

The True Three Little Pigs

Once upon a time a sow sent her three little pigs out into the world to find a new fortune. The first little pig saw a man with a load of straw. He said, "I will buy this straw and build a house with it." He built his house and moved in. I came down the road, dying of hunger. I knocked on the door asking for food. He wouldn't let me in and I was dying. So I took the biggest breath I could and blew his house down. I was dying so I had to eat the pig. But it wasn't my fault. I had to eat.

The next day the second pig saw a man with a load of sticks. He said, "I will buy these sticks and build a house with them". He built a house and moved in. Then I came along, still starving for the first pig was very skimpy. I knocked on the door but he wouldn't let me in. So I huffed and puffed and blew his house down. I ate him for I was very hungry.

The third pig came upon a man with a load of bricks. He bought the bricks for he knew they would make a strong house. He built a house and got settled in. I came asking for food but he wouldn't let me in. I told him I would meet him to pick radishes the next day at six. But the pig went at five and was back by the time I got there. That night I got really hungry. I wanted that pig bad! So I was going to go down the chimney. He had a big pot of water on the fire. He was going to try to eat me but I jumped over the pot of water and ate the third little pig. After three pigs I was plenty full.

by,
Big Bad Wolf

Teachers' Ratings

Theme	3, 3, 5, 3, 3, 3, 3
Character	1, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2
Setting	2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2
Plot	3, 4, 3, 4, 4, 4, 3
Communication	3, 4, 3, 3, 3, 2, 3

On the whole, the teachers rated the **theme** of this story as a "3," because they felt that the wolf's explanation of his hunger was quite explicit. They pointed to sentences such as, "I was dying so I had to eat the pig" and "I ate him for I was very hungry" as supporting evidence for their scores. A "3" is an appropriate rating, for the story is based on the wolf's justification of his actions (eating the pig) and he explains his reasoning in quite explicit terms. One teacher gave a "5" rating for theme, but this is inappropriate, for the theme of the wolf's hunger is not subtle in any way, nor are secondary themes developed.

The typical **character** rating from the teachers was a "1"—the character of the wolf was flat and unchanging, with hunger being his only motivation. But this insight into motivation, explicit as it is, led us to rate the character development as a "3" for we are beginning to get some rounding in feeling ("I was dying") as the wolf justifies his actions ("But it wasn't my fault. I had to eat.") We would, however, argue against a "4" rating, for the wolf is clearly not going to change his character.

Setting was appropriately rated as a "2." "Once upon a time" is the only indication of where and when the story takes place and the setting bears no relationship to other narrative elements.

The teachers debated between a "3" and "4" rating on **plot**. The story seems closer to a "4," for it has more than one episode. Each episode has the critical elements of problem, emotional response, action, and outcome, and the episodes are related and sequential as they build through the wolf's feasting on all three pigs.

Finally, the teachers appropriately scored **communication** as a "3," noting the use of transitions such as "then" and "so," as well as the literal style and explicit tone. While the writing is clear, it does not make use of more figurative language (I was as hungry as a...) and would not merit a "4" rating.

Again, after scoring the story the teachers used the feedback form to provide commendations and recommendations.

Theme

Recommendations & Commendations	Metacommentary
• That was one hungry wolf! You showed how hungry he was through his actions. • You stated the reasons why the wolf had to eat the pigs (He was SO...hungry). • The wolf is very explicit—he always explains why he had to do this.	In general, these teachers commend the student for the explicit justification for the main character's actions (The wolf was SO hungry he just had to eat the pigs). This kind of up-front explanation is typical of fractured fairy tales where the expression of a particular point of view is key.
• Examine your theme—does it justify the wolf's behavior? • You stated your theme clearly "I was dying of hunger." Your story doesn't justify eating all three pigs.	However, in terms of recommendations, these two teachers felt that the justification, while plausible, would work for only one or two pigs, not the third. We agree. Our comment to the author might be: *"You wanted the third pig 'so bad,' but why? Were you still hungry? Remember, in this fractured fairy tale, you are trying to convince the reader of your innocence!"* The teachers' statements on justification and our comment on convincing the reader would only work if the ideas had been a part of the class instruction. The implication here is that the antagonist is trying to convince the reader that he or she is the protagonist (or hero), and deserves sympathy. The second comment holds two statements that are somewhat at odds with each other. While a teacher can certainly commend and critique the same narrative component, the message must be constructed in a way that is clear, specific, and, most important, *usable*. If we were to rewrite this comment, we would write: *"You stated your theme clearly ('I was dying of hunger.'), but your story doesn't justify eating all three pigs. Wouldn't you be full after eating one or two pigs?"*
• You were very clear on the reasons why the wolf ate the three pigs. The story needed to include how the pigs defend themselves or their reaction.	This teacher worried about the lack of emotional reaction on the part of the pigs, and suggested that adding this dimension would enhance the story. However, since the story is written from the wolf's point of view, it is critical to extend the wolf's justification rather than develop an emotional response for the pigs. The purpose of this fractured tale is not to engender sympathy for the pigs, but to join in humorous cahoots with the villain.

Character

Recommendations & Commendations	Metacommentary
• You set the characters out nicely. It might help develop sympathy for the wolf's character if you gave a short sentence of why you were "dying of hunger" to develop a little more. • Flat character development for pigs is good. Need to develop character of Wolf to solicit reader's empathy.	The teachers' comments are quite appropriate here. Even though fairy tales are usually noted for their stereotypical characters (we don't really need to know more about the wolf other than he's "big and bad"), the genre of the fractured fairy tale is different. Because the story is turned around and told from the wolf's point of view, we really need to know about the motivation behind his intentions in order to justify his actions (which is something we don't need for the pigs). While further physical description might help, it is more critical that the author develop the wolf in terms of feeling and motivation in order to engage the reader in some sympathy. The second teacher's advice to "solicit reader's empathy" has too much jargon and could be rewritten: *"Develop the character of the Wolf so that the reader is on his side. Your sentences 'But it wasn't my fault. I had to eat.' are a good way to pull the reader into your point of view, so add more of this kind of explanation."*
• Could you develop the wolf even more? • Could you describe the wolf with more adjectives? • More physical/mental descriptions needed for the characters.	These comments are rather vague in nature—for there are many ways to develop the wolf. He could be rounded in terms of physical description, of emotional reaction, of motivation and intention, and so on. It is not enough to say "add more"—teachers need to suggest a specific direction. Our suggested comment above tries to show the author where his justification worked, and why he needs to provide further explanation.

Setting

Recommendations & Commendations	Metacommentary
• Little attention to setting which is fine for the genre.	This teacher appropriately reminds the student of the genre-driven nature of the setting choice. We really do not need to have extensive information on the setting unless it is specifically tied to the reasons for the wolf's hunger.
• Explicit "Once upon a time..." • Very little setting or placement of characters.	These teachers' comments are too nebulous—it is not clear whether they are lauding or critiquing the slim setting. The first teacher comment above comes closer to a clear commendation.
• Why was he so hungry? • What caused the wolf to be so hungry?	The comments on hunger are also incomplete. If their argument stems from some need for there to be a "famine in the land," then they should state so explicitly: *"Why was the wolf so hungry? Was there a famine in the land? Did a number of days pass between eating the pigs?"*
• More details on where the pigs are from.	While this information may be of interest, it would probably be more helpful to have more information on the wolf's background than the pigs'. In fact, any more focus on the pigs might serve to distract the reader from the author's main purpose, which is to stimulate sympathy for the wolf and thus to create an effective fractured fairy tale.

Communication

Recommendations & Commendations	Metacommentary
• Clever ways of stating wolf's reasons for eating pigs and outwitting the last pig. • We really know the wolf is talking.	Though brief, these comments come the closest to being helpful, for the teachers are remarking on the author's ability to bring the voice of the wolf to life. Both comments could be enhanced, however, if they explicitly showed the child his more successful phrases. *"When you wrote 'I wanted that pig bad!' I could hear just how desperate the Wolf was becoming. This kind of language is also funny and draws the reader into the Wolf's point of view."*
• I didn't feel any emotional response. How did you survive?	This teacher presents two seemingly unrelated ideas that are difficult to decipher. Other teachers, however, did feel an emotional response—one of humor. And we know that the wolf survived through his feast of three pigs.
• Paragraphs in clear sequential paragraphs.	This comment is more concerned with convention than communication. Comments on communication should primarily deal the effective use of language to get a message across.

Conclusion

Whether involved in individual conferencing with one student or looking across students' writing for patterns of growth, Ms. Stevens, the hypothetical teacher in the introduction to this guidebook, is emblematic of elementary writing teachers across the country—teachers who have questions and concerns about how to guide the growth of young writers. We have had Ms. Stevens in mind throughout the writing of this guidebook. By providing an overview of the *Writing What You Read* approach to assessment, an overview that includes detailed explanation of our methods and explicit examples of their uses, we hope we have been helpful.

In a recent talk to teachers and teacher educators, Lisa Delpit (1993) suggested that "teaching means taking a proactive role and not just accepting children for what they are." In our program, we have tried to emphasize the

Plot

Recommendations & Commendations	Metacommentary
• Surprise ending good. I expected the third pig to survive. Climax needs justification for foiled plan. • You included more than one episode in your story and tied it altogether (Good transition). Outcome (conclusion) needs to be expanded further. • I liked the way things got a little more developed as you went along. Clear beginning, middle and end. Were you really that hungry after the first pig?	These teachers provide clear commendations for the relationship between episodes and the surprising climax. However, they also uniformly stress the need for justification, challenging the author to supply a stronger rationale for the wolf's all-consuming hunger as the action builds. We agree that the story would be enhanced through a build-up of justification (e.g., storing food for lean times or the first two pigs being only small snacks), but think the teachers' comments could be enhanced if they offered some possible directions: *"You said that the first pig was so 'skimpy'—maybe you could build on this idea. For example, you might say that the second pig was bigger but still only an appetizer. Talk with other classmates and see if you can come up with a better idea for why the Wolf continues to be so hungry."* We also think that comments that are contradictory in nature need to be constructed to eliminate confusion. For example, we would rewrite the first comment: *"Your surprise ending (the third pig dies!) was original and funny. But it happened so suddenly, I didn't quite believe it. How did the wolf know to jump over the pot of hot water? Did he see it as he came down the chimney?"* Our comment also attempts to eliminate some of the jargon ("justification for foiled plan") in the first teacher's comment.
• Good flow of action from beginning—end.	While this comment is laudatory, it is not very specific. Commendations need to be as explicit as recommendations. Notice how the second teacher comment above offers a more detailed explanation of what was good about the piece.

proactive nature of teaching and the earnest engagement of teachers *with* children, not only in the careful assessment of *where children are now* in their writing, but in the explicit advice on *where they can go next*. It is not helpful to "grade" a child and then give her no opportunity either to understand her achievement or to rework her writing toward further mastery. It is not enough to praise a child, even if praise is an essential means of giving children the self-confidence to continue in their writing. Our purposes are to help teachers become knowledgeable critics of what they read and write. Equipped with sound knowledge of literature, both its characteristics and possibilities, teachers will be better able to make *commendations* and *recommendations* to help children become the best writers they can be.

When we turn a critical eye to our own work, we believe there is much to commend, and, like the writing of the children in our guidebook, areas for further growth. First, what have we achieved to date?

- Our work is grounded in a long-term collaboration between writing teachers and researchers. Working together—pouring over tradebooks and student work, discussing, disagreeing, revising, and rethinking our purposes and goals—has been a continual feature. The phrase "writing is a process" could not be better highlighted than by the work of our group as we have traveled through multiple iterations of the feedback form, the rubric, and the articles that stem from our collaboration.

- Our second commendation has to do with the strong links between curriculum, instruction, and assessment as we try to keep sometimes disparate classroom, school, and district/state processes in constant connection. Thus we have worked to reach consensus on schoolwide curriculum that would make assessment a real tool for communicating across grade levels. The uniform use of the rubric and feedback form across the grades as well as the consistent emphasis on language as a tool for critical expression forms a common knowledge base for teachers, students, and ultimately parents to draw on and utilize.

- Finally, we commend our focus on genre as we help teachers to become more articulate and differentiated in their responses to

children's writing. The orchestration of the narrative components (e.g., character, setting) can be quite distinct in different genres. Knowledge of the general characteristics of certain "families" of narrative allows teachers to provide genre-appropriate advice to young writers.

What useful *recommendations* can we make for the next phase of our efforts?

- Our first recommendation returns to genre. (After all, as we stated earlier, a teacher can make commendations and recommendations on the same aspect as long as the issues are clear!) While genre does provide a specific and purposeful way of analyzing text, we worry that we may be misinterpreted as suggesting that genres are frozen in form. Genre lines are not hard and fast, and we must work to help teachers view the rubric as a *framework for interpretation*, not a prescription for instruction and assessment. Teachers must not restrict their students' writing to a set of inflexible rules.

- Second, we recommend further emphasis on the design of principles that can guide teachers' comments. We have made much progress—moving away from generic comments like "Good job!"—but there is further work to be done in helping teachers make *useful* comments. To date we have emphasized the importance of focusing commentary on specific instructional issues, explicit examples from tradebook texts, and/or the particular context of an individual child's writing accomplishments. Nevertheless, while we have found it easy to point out a nebulous or unhelpful comment, it has been much more difficult to demonstrate ways of turning these comments into coherent and clear critique. Our own ideas and examples have evolved markedly in the context of preparing this guidebook, and we will continue this line of work.

- Third, we need to focus our attention on ways that *students* can become productively engaged in assessing their own and their peers' work. Students at our development site do engage in assessment activities, but, like their teachers, their comments have often focused on mechanics ("I remembered my periods") or on very general characteristics of writing that do not help the child much with her

current writing project ("I used lots of descriptive words"). Like their teachers, children can benefit from thoughtful reflection on reading and writing as they advise their peers (" 'Member that witch in *Hansel and Gretel*? Maybe you should tell more about *your* witch. You just say she's ugly, but does she have red eyes and a wart on her chin or what?") and as they plan revisions ("Now that I've got the basic story, I'm going to go back and put in some clues and hints that will foreshadow the ending").

- Finally, teachers need guidance in the design of assessment feedback appropriate to different assessment contexts. What is appropriate to share with a child when she is planning her story? during her first draft? after she has published? when she shares her narrative portfolio collection? We confronted these questions as we prepared examples of comments for our "metacommentary." While commentary should in every case attend to an analysis of narrative, it will serve different purposes depending on the context.

Many times during the course of working with teachers and their young writers, we too have leaned on what we have read to help us in our writing. One source of continual inspiration for us has been the work of Annie Dillard, particularly in her book *The Writing Life* (1989). With regard to revision, rewriting, and self-assessment, she writes:

> Many aspects of the work are still uncertain, of course; you know that. You know that if you proceed you will change things and learn things, that the form will grow under your hands and develop new and richer lights. But that change will not alter the vision or its deep structures; it will only enrich it. (p. 56)

And so the work continues...

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